SELF-TRAINING IN MEDITATION

A. H. McNeile

SELF-TRAINING IN MEDITATION

SELF-TRAINING IN MEDITATION

BY

A. H. McNEILE, D.D.

REGIUS PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN, FELLOW OF SIDNEY SUSSEX COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE; AUTHOR OF "CONCERNING CHRIST," "SELF-TRAINING IN PRAYER," ETC.

"Despise not thy prayer, for He to whom thou prayest despiseth it not."

S. BERNARD

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
NEW YORK :: :: MCMXXVI

COPYRIGHT, 1926, BY
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

PREFACE

Many people pray, but few read their Bibles. Of the few who do, some read as a daily duty, and Bible reading as a literary and historical study is not uncommon; but Bible reading as a means of spiritual growth is rare. Most of the books written on Meditation are unsuitable for beginners because they make the double mistake of giving him too much, and of expecting too much of him.

This volume makes no pretensions to be a complete treatment of the subject, and it makes no demands on the reader except a real desire to reach after God. But if he has that desire, it is hoped that the suggestions for self training offered in these pages may help to spur him on towards the engrossing experience described by St. Jerome: "In the Gospels the spirit is always joined to the letter, and anything that at first sight seems cold is warm if you touch it."

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

https://archive.org/details/selftraininginme0000ahmc_y0r4

CONTENTS

		PAGE
PREFACE		v
CHAPTER		
I.	PRAYER OF THOUGHT	1
II.	NATURE	7
III.	HUMAN NATURE	10
IV.	BIBLE READING	14
V.	BIBLE STUDY	17
VI.	PREPARATION	22
VII.	SEEKING AND FINDING	26
VIII.	FURTHER SEARCH	33
IX.	FRESH MATERIAL	40
X.	GOSPEL STORIES	49
XI.	"LORD, SHEW US THE FATHER"	54
XII.	THE BEAUTY OF HOLINESS	60
XIII.	MORE BEAUTIES	66
XIV.	THE EPISTLES	70
XV.	SUBJECTS	76
XVI.	SOME SUGGESTIONS	80

SELF-TRAINING IN MEDITATION

I. PRAYER OF THOUGHT

THE heart of the true Christian has one chief desire—to get into close contact with God. And his chief motive in this desire is not to do good to his own soul, but to satisfy the love of God. It is worth while to pause at the outset, and to think very carefully about these two sentences, in order to test our spiritual life by this standard. Those who attain to it with any degree of fullness are very few; but the first step towards it is to be able to tell God humbly and truthfully that we really *want* to. We may be conscious of many lesser desires and lower motives, but the growth of our souls will be in proportion as we can make these the chief.

Close contact with God is the first aim and object of all prayer. In *Self-Training in Prayer* an attempt was made to draw out this thought. It was there said that the essence of prayer is "by a deliberate act of our whole being to make

real to ourselves the divine Reality." And it was pointed out that prayer, in this sense, has three methods: (1) Prayer of Utterance, or vocal prayer, including petitions for ourselves, intercession for others, and praise and thanksgiving to God; (2) Prayer of Thought, or meditation; (3) Prayer of Union, or contemplation—the give-and-take of love between us and God. The principles which we are to follow in the first of these are laid down for us in the Lord's Prayer, which Jesus Christ gave us as a model; and a short study of these principles was made in *After This Manner Pray Ye.*

The object of the following pages is to describe the second method, meditation—what it means, and some of the many ways in which it can be practiced. There is no doubt at all that it needs practice. As in any other art we must be content to begin as beginners, and slowly, perhaps very slowly, to improve. Those who have improved, and are already experts, will have formed their own methods, and will not need these suggestions. But there are numberless Christians who would readily admit that they are still at the beginning, and have not improved at all. Meditation is one of the words which sound very dry and formal until we get

to the thing itself, and learn by growing experience what it can mean to us. When we do that, we find that it is impossible to exaggerate its value, and we begin to wonder how we could ever have been content to aim at spiritual growth without it. I may be allowed to begin by repeating the larger part of the short chapter which deals with it in the former of the two little books just mentioned.

"The search for truth has been the occupation of all thinking people in all countries at all times. In every branch of learning students profess, as the object of their lives, to be seekers after truth; some call themselves seekers after God. But in every branch of learning, intellectual search will teach men only facts about God and His actions, it will not find God Himself. We saw how true this is in thinking about a rose. Biologist, botanist, mathematician, chemist, or all combined, cannot make you know what a rose really is. And if this is the case with the divine Reality in Nature it is not less so with the divine personal Reality in man. To reach that, requires our will and our emotions more than our intellect; it requires something which is of the nature of spiritual thought rather than of study. And this is afforded by what is usually called medi-

tation, in which the intellectual faculty is not excluded but takes the lowest place.

"Large numbers of Christians think of meditation as an elaborate and artificial exercise of pious ingenuity for which a few religiously-minded people seem to have time and inclination, but which for most people is quite out of the question. I will not pretend that it is easy. The easy things are not always the most worth doing. But whatever else may be said about it, 'elaborate' and 'artificial' are the last epithets that it deserves. Utter simplicity is the first mark of true meditation. The reason why it is not easy is that, being a method of reaching after contact with God, it requires all the preliminary conditions of penitence and humility. It requires a real longing to find the very God Himself, and it requires considerable determination, especially for beginners.

"An illustration may help to show what it means. Some people, when they travel, fly from place to place, seeing the famous sights as fast as trains and motors will carry them. They want to have seen as many things as possible. But this continual hustling allows of no real, intimate, inner knowledge of any one thing or place. That is like a person who reads through some prayers, or a passage in the

Bible, and feels that he has done his duty to God for the day. But has he? Has he found God? Has he gained afresh any real, intimate, inner knowledge of Him? To do that, he must constantly pause over a verse, a phrase, even a word, and gaze right into its meaning, and get something out of it for his soul. He must go so slowly that it becomes a means of seeking after Reality, and finding in scene after scene, or sentence after sentence, a message from God, which he in turn can translate into fervent prayer for himself and for others, into an earnest longing, or a hope, or a resolve, or a cry of penitence. It does not need elaborate study or cleverness; it does not need any careful arrangement of your thoughts, such as you would want if you had to preach a sermon or give a lesson; indeed, it is a misuse of meditation to make it a means of preparing a sermon or a lesson. But it needs an eager desire to use the words, through which you are very slowly wandering, as a medium by which to get yourself into closer contact with God. It does not matter what you do with the passage; your treatment of it is known only to God and yourself. It does not matter whether you can exercise much brilliant imagination, or none at all. The only thing you have to do is to make

the passage, or sentence, or word, by any means you like, and by as many means as you can contrive, helpful to your spiritual life, that is, to your will and your love, your determination and your longing to reach after God. You need not expect to gain much pleasure from it at first; possibly you may never gain much pleasure from it. The facility in meditation of the spontaneous kind that makes it a daily delight to some people is not given to every one. But the patient continuance in effort is itself a discipline of incalculable value. And even to those who find the effort very hard indeed there comes from time to time a flash of spiritual insight which lights up a sentence, and makes the way easier. For the purpose of meditation the New Testament, since it deals directly with Jesus Christ, especially a Gospel, is more likely to be helpful than anything else, because He is the perfect revelation of God, and therefore it is easier to reach God by pondering on Him than on any other thing or person. . . . All the great saints in the Church's history, and all the holiest men and women alive to-day, have made use of meditation as an absolutely indispensable part of their self-training. And no Christian who really wants to train himself in prayer can do without it."

II. NATURE

IF now we have formed a general idea of what meditation is, we can prepare to make a start in our self-training in it. And first we must examine our materials, which include more than the Bible. If we are to get into touch with divine Reality by this method we need some definite means of approach. It is quite useless to tell a beginner simply that he must think about God. You might as well tell a man blind from birth that he must think about light. God, who dwelleth in the light that no man can approach unto, the Eternal, Immortal, Invisible, can be thought about only as He reveals Himself, in many parts and many methods. The light that we are able to see with our little human faculties is reflected light. The materials for meditation are, therefore, the various means by which He reveals something of Himself.

The first of these is Nature, using the word in its popular meaning of the physical Universe. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and

the firmament sheweth His handiwork." When I "consider the heavens, the works of His fingers, the moon and stars which He has ordained," or when I "consider the lilies of the field, how they grow," my mind can learn something of His power, His beauty, and many other things about Him. But if I consider them with my mind alone, that is, make a merely intellectual study of them, I am not meditating. It is thought, but not Prayer of Thought. In other words, I must not be content to consider *them,* I must consider *Him* who expresses Himself by means of them. We can speak of meditating on something in Nature, but it is more accurate to say that we meditate on God, and on God alone, the object that is before our thoughts being only the material instrument by which we reach Him, a cord by which we are drawn into personal contact with Him, a channel by which His influence, that is, Himself, can be poured into us.

Why do not Christians make more use of this means of grace? for a means of grace it can certainly be, if it is used as such. Few possess to the same extent as the poet, the artist, or the musician, the natural gift which enables him to penetrate by immediate experience to the Reality which lies behind and

within Nature. But his exercise of that natural gift is not in itself meditation, in the sense in which we are here using the word, unless it leads him to a personal realization of God, unless, that is, his art finds its completion in religion. But there is no Christian who cannot, to some extent, train his faculties so that they may lead him to contact with God by the road of Nature. To the religious mind "the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead," so that we should be "without excuse" even if we possessed no other avenue of approach to Him.

III. HUMAN NATURE

BUT we do in fact possess much more. While God expresses Himself in physical Nature ("In Him was life"), He expresses Himself more fully and deeply, that is, with a greater degree of reality, in human nature ("The life was the light of men"). Every human gift and faculty, the power of mind, the energy of will, the force of the emotions, in all their numberless forms of exercise are instruments by which, in varying degrees, the infinite life of God, the eternal Reality, is self-expressed. Many people study human nature for various purposes, scientific, educational, or commercial. Without such study man's social life could not go forward. But extraordinarily few people make use of human nature as material for spiritual meditation. It is only the few who do, who know what a wealth lies hidden behind and within every human being. Some one has what we call a "gift" for music, or languages, or hospital nursing, or managing children, or organization, or anything else.

When this comes before our notice, do we simply give it a passing tribute of admiration? or worse, of envy? Or, worse still, do we instinctively tend to disparage or belittle the value of the gift?—as though by shutting our eyes to, or detracting from, the good points in another we somehow managed to increase, or show up more clearly, the good points in ourselves. If, on the contrary, we have made it a habit to use human nature as material for meditation, our self-training will have produced a very different instinct, namely, to see the Giver in the gift—not as a mere theory, but as a real and vivid experience. If we have meditated on the Origin of natural gifts, that is, the Father of lights from whom every good and perfect gift cometh down, then to witness the exercise of such a gift, in any way, at any time, by any one, can lift our hearts straight to Him. The difficulty that we find in putting at its true value the good in other people shows us, as few things will, how naturally prone we are to pride and self-centeredness. It needs love and sympathy, very often, to see it at all, and it needs humility to accept it as a help to our knowledge of God.

And when we pass from natural gifts to consider men's spiritual endowment, we ought to

be able, even more easily, to use human lives around us as material for meditation. Every virtue they possess, and every conquest that we see them win, and every thought of holiness which has helped in the growth of their souls, and added an indefinable something to their faces—are His alone. And to dwell on these, as instances present themselves, and to be eagerly on the lookout for them, will help us to realize that this sad world is much more divine than it might appear on the surface. These are sure methods by which we can enter into touch with the divine Spirit, the divine Life, the divine Reality.

I once knew a raw, ignorant Scotchman, who returned from France badly wounded. After the amputation of both legs a little below the knees he was for weeks in acute pain, and as helpless as a baby. During that time he was the bubbling source of all the fun and chaff in the hospital ward. During that time, also, he was prepared for Confirmation. When, at last, he was brought in a wheel chair to his first Communion, the hospital chapel was nearly full. But before we knew what he meant to do, he climbed somehow out of the chair, and shuffled on his knees the whole way up the aisle to a vacant seat in the front row,

gloriously regardless of what any one was thinking of him, entirely engrossed in the thought of his coming Communion. I offer him to the reader as a piece of human material for spiritual meditation.

IV. BIBLE READING

THE book of physical Nature and the book of human lives and characters are rich in material. But we now pass to our main subject, the Book of the Holy Scriptures, "which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." "Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness; that the man of God may be equipped, completely equipped, unto every good work." "They were written for our admonition." "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience, and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope." Many other books can be used for the purpose of meditation; but every book which offers spiritual thoughts is only a rivulet from the broad stream of the Bible. No attempt is made in these pages to suggest such books. They are legion, and a few of them are of very great value. But it is far better for

the beginner to go straight to the source, which is inexhaustible.

Bible reading may be compared with playing the piano. The effects of playing the piano can range from the boredom of a five-finger exercise to all the delights and ecstasies, the inspiration and comfort, of the best music. The effects of reading the Bible can range from the boredom of perfunctory reading of a passage, that we neither care for nor understand, to the absorbing joy of the saint, and the rapt contemplation of the mystic. Now, in music you can play or listen to the performance of a written composition, or else you can compose something of your own. What are the alternatives corresponding with these in meditation? You can listen to sermons, and read devotional books, in which other people draw out for you the inner Reality of the written word; or else you can use the Bible as material for meditation, and draw out its inner Reality for yourself. In the case of music most of us will readily admit that a written work by some one else is much more likely than our own composition to carry us to the soul of music, that is, to give us a deep inner experience of Reality. It is probable that very few readers of this chapter could compose an inspiring

musical work to save their lives. But here is a point at which our illustration fails. Not one reader, if he sets about it in the right way, need despair of drawing for himself from the words of the Bible inspiration, strength, comfort, exhilaration, guidance, reproof, correction, and many other helps that he needs. Your own meditations, and the products of other people's meditations, are both useful, but the latter ought to take the second place. For our growth in holiness, for our satisfaction of the love of God, no one else's thoughts, however beautiful, can do away with the need of getting into contact with divine Reality for ourselves by first-hand experience.

V. BIBLE STUDY

ONE preliminary must here be dealt with. In Chapter I it was said that meditation requires our will and our emotions more than our intellect. The intellectual faculty is not excluded, but takes the lowest place. What are we to say, then, about the intellectual study of the Bible? An enormous amount of labor is being spent by an army of students on the contents of the Bible considered from literary, historical, and ethical points of view. The history of Israel and of the surrounding nations, the life of Jesus Christ, the history of the early Christian Church, the dates and the composition of the books, the growth of laws and customs, the tracing of the development, and the comparison of social and religious ideas, geography, the study of manuscripts and versions, and many other things, make up what is usually known as Bible study. To these can be added Christian apologetics, and numberless subjects of ardent theological controversy. How does all this stand with regard to our

soul's life, our growth in holiness? Some Christians will sweep it all away as irrelevant waste of time. They will ask, What has true religion to do with Biblical criticism, and all the other -isms and -ologies? Not a few will go further, and say that they are an actual hindrance—that true religion is injured by intellectual thought and study and argument. The latter objection cannot be dealt with here; the great problem of the relation in which our reason stands to our faith in, and love for, God lies outside the scope of this little book. But it is well to remind ourselves that many of the great saints of the Christian Church were also great thinkers and Bible students. How should we have fared if St. Paul had confined himself to a purely devotional study of the Bible, and had never argued? or Origen, or St. Augustine, or St. Thomas Aquinas? And we may add, that when people declare that intellectual study has injured their faith, one of two things has happened, or perhaps both things together: firstly, they have treated reason as the *sole* faculty which has the right to deal with things of God; and secondly, the injury to their faith has been not merely intellectual, but moral—a weakness of will, and shrinking from the highest standards.

To the other objection, that intellectual study is irrelevant to religion and therefore a waste of time, two answers may be given, the one general, the other bearing in particular upon our present subject.

1. If our human faculties are gifts from God, they are gifts in the sense of "talents," with which we are to trade for His pleasure and glory. If we develop our will power along the line of moral activity, and our emotions along the line of sacred desires and aspirations, and yet neglect our powers of thought and reasoning, which might be developed along the line of intellectual expansion, we shall be burying at least one of our talents in the earth, and we shall not be as "good and faithful servants" as if we had traded with them all. God wants the *whole* of us; and that means that He wants the whole of us to grow. Some people, of course, have more opportunity and ability in matters of intellect than others; and "he to whom much is given, from him shall much be required." And the same is true, when you come to think of it, of will power and emotions. But every Christian is bound to cultivate all three as much as he can. The development of the whole of us must result in greater force of character, greater power of influence, greater

service to God, than if one element in our being is starved and stunted. There is no doubt at all that the spiritual results are bad when the intellect is exalted at the expense of the other faculties; but if it is neglected, God does not as fully as He might "receive His own with usury."

2. You cannot meditate on the words of the Bible at all without *some* intellectual grasp of its contents. You cannot, for example, praise God for His guidance of the life of His people, or for the gradual progress of His Self-revelation, if you know nothing of the historical facts of that guidance or that progress. You cannot wonder and rejoice at the mysteries of the Faith unless you have made some study of what they are. The mysteries need not, and cannot, be understood, in the sense of being fully grasped and explained by our little minds; but they must be studied, and to some extent formulated, before we can meditate upon them. To put it generally, the better that you know the contents and wording of your Bible, and the great truths which it enshrines, the greater will be your grasp of the material, and the ease, the suppleness, the elasticity, with which you can use it. The amount of study which is to form the basis of meditation, its

apparatus or scaffolding, will naturally vary with the intellectual caliber of each individual, and the amount of time that he can give to it: and if any one has little of either, he will not, on that account, give less pleasure to God. "It is accepted according to that a man hath." But while "he that can gather little" of intellectual wealth "has no lack" in spiritual things, the converse also is true, that "he that gathers much has nothing over"; he needs all that he can get, if his meditations are to be as full and rich and varied as he can make them.

VI. PREPARATION

WE have now finished with preliminaries and are going to try to meditate. How are we to set about it in order to get into touch with Reality, that is, with God? It sounds obvious to say that we must begin at the beginning; but there are a good many people who do not realize what the beginning is. Meditation is not a mental but a spiritual exercise; or, more accurately, it is the applying of our mental powers to spiritual things. It is "Prayer of Thought." Our finite mental powers are to be the vessel by which we are to "draw water out of the wells of salvation," the inexhaustible fountains, the ocean of divine Reality. The vessels can hold very little at a time, but for that very reason we must incessantly draw that we may incessantly drink. But this spiritual use of our human minds is impossible without the help of the Holy Spirit of God to guide them into all truth, that is, to guide them gradually into all Reality. Therefore, before we open our Bible we must first shut our

eyes, and we must say something to show Him that we want His help. "Holy Spirit, help me to touch God to-day."—"Holy Spirit, take the things of Christ and show them to me."—"Holy Spirit, my mind is a blank; help me to reach something real in my reading this morning."—"Lighten my darkness, I beseech Thee, O Lord."—"Come, Holy Ghost, my soul inspire, and lighten with celestial fire." You may like to use longer prayers than these; but I think that short prayers are easier for most people. It does not matter in the least what words you use in asking for help, provided that you mean them; and do not think of looking at your Bible until you do mean them.

But such a prayer as that pours from a heart that already has a longing to be helped. And some people try to meditate without having got even as far as that. They have often read, in books on meditation, that they must begin with a prayer to the Holy Spirit, and they duly say a prayer; but there is no heart in it; no reality; and therefore no response from Him. To reach after God is unthinkable without the desire to succeed. We must really and truly *want* to touch Him. "Seek and ye shall find" is the motto written across our subject; but if we seek listlessly, aimlessly, not quite clear

as to what we want to find, and not particularly anxious to find anything, we can hardly be surprised if very little comes of it. Many people try to meditate with one eye, so to speak, on the clock, wondering how they can fill out the minutes that they have set themselves; and, of course, they do not fill them out, they merely waste them. They often fail to reach God simply because they are not hungry for spiritual food. It is true that eating sometimes helps to produce an appetite; that can often be a comfort and encouragement. But there must be at least a desire to become hungry.

This might seem to be the necessary beginning. But if we do not feel even the desire to become hungry, we may have to make a beginning still further back. Want of appetite is not a disease in itself, but a symptom. The disease always, in every one, is sin. Sin that we are not sorry for, sin that we have not really made serious efforts to try to conquer, and which has, therefore, not been forgiven, makes spiritual hunger, and even the desire for it, impossible. That only the pure in heart shall see God is true generally, and it is true particularly of meditation. It might be thought that any one who would take the trouble to read so far in a book on this subject would

hardly need this reminder. But experience shows that that is not the case. Many people are interested in religious books, and are even ready for religious exercises; but all the time, if they think of it carefully, they know that there is some failing or weakness in their lives which they have not yet begun to face quite steadily with a fixed and earnest determination to fight against it. Without that determination, penitence is not penitence at all, but merely regret. Nothing but penitence true and genuine will call down the divine forgiveness. The real beginning of meditation, as of all other attempts to reach after God, is "repentance from dead works," the very first stone in the "foundation" (Heb. vi:1) on which we can rise to higher things.

We see, then, that penitence, hunger, and prayer for enlightenment must all come before we open our Bible. I am sure that the failure of many Christians to gain much from their meditation arises far more often from opening their Bible too quickly than from shutting it too quickly. A large part of their time may well be spent on these preparations. If they do that, they may very likely touch God with the first sentence that they read. Otherwise they will probably grope and find nothing.

VII. SEEKING AND FINDING

THE necessity for spiritual preparation need not be insisted on again. It must be assumed throughout the rest of this book. But when we have prepared ourselves, and open our Bible, what exactly are we to do? Some story, perhaps, or parable from one of the gospels lies before us. And having read it through some one may say, "But I know that passage well; I have read those verses scores of times before, and could almost say them by heart; what more am I to do with them?" You are to try to make them real for yourself, to find something that is stored up in them, to get something out of them that you can *add* to the life of your soul. If a small boy were learning what arithmetical addition meant, you might teach him to write down, or work mentally, some addition sums; but he would realize the practical meaning of it all much more vividly if he possessed five marbles, and you made him a present of five more. He would at once feel that it was arithmetic made

real. We may, in a given passage, feel incapable of finding something novel that we never thought of before; but we can, nevertheless, dwell upon the words, and let them slowly sink into us in such a way that something fresh may come of it, some element in our spiritual life may be vitalized, enriched, expanded, deepened, whether by an old truth or a new one. It is to be Bible reading made real.

Many books have been written containing schemes and outlines, detailing the several parts of which meditation should consist. To follow these schemes, and perform spiritual exercises on the lines laid down, is an excellent discipline; but the beginner, for the most part, finds them too formal and regular. Print is so bare and cold that he feels it exceedingly difficult to make use of exact rules and headings and tabulated statements in order to rise into touch with God. He must find his way for himself, and by himself, by practice and spiritual experience. But as he progresses in his self-training he will probably discover that his thoughts do, in fact, tend to move along paths already trodden by others. And the rules offered for his guidance turn out to be a map of the district which he has already explored for himself.

Let us put rules on one side, and take a well-known parable of our Lord to serve as an illustration of the way in which we are going to set about our meditation.

"What woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece," does not earnestly desire to find it? Her eagerness can be taken as a picture of our desire to find something that we can add to our spiritual store, something that we shall "seek as silver, and search for as for hid treasures" (Prov. ii:4). How often have those of us who meditate at all tried to do it without any real eagerness. All these pages will be waste paper to any one who starts with the thought, "Oh, I may as well try it; but I do not really suppose I shall get anything out of it." We must start, as the woman did, perfectly certain that the valuable thing is there somewhere, and determined to find it. What, then, does she do? She lights a candle. There is the spiritual illumination that we must get from the Holy Spirit before we begin to search, an illumination that will go with us the whole time. It cannot be described to those who have never tried to get it. Only those who have, know the wonderful way in which it makes helpful thoughts to stand out from time to time as they go on thinking and

thinking. Then with the help of it she will "sweep the house and seek diligently till she find" her lost piece. We know for certain that some real treasure is in the well-known words of the passage that we have chosen for meditation, if we can only get at it. So we must "sweep" the verses; we must examine, with the light of our divine Candle, every crevice, every sentence and word, turning them over in our minds, trying to look at them from different points of view, and to think out different ways in which they can be applied, trying to find something *real* to deepen our love or our penitence, to enlarge our sympathies, to brace our wills, to give us a better understanding of God, something, in short, that will lift us nearer to Him. Imagine the woman's feelings at the moment that her eyes at last light upon her piece of silver. Try to feel with her the sudden change in her whole being at the moment of possession. See how she pounces upon it, picks it out from the dust on the floor, holds it near the candle to get the full enjoyment of it as she turns it about in her hands. And her enjoyment is no doubt the greater because she had to seek diligently till she found it. It is often not only the intrinsic value of something that we gain in a medita-

tion, but the sheer finding of it that will make us look back on our search with a sigh of pleasure. Whether the passage has yielded us a new thought, or whether we have made an old thought *mean* more to us than before, it is a real addition not merely to our mind, but to our life.

But now, if some reader has found in this parable a helpful picture of meditation, and if it has, to ever so small an extent, yielded a fresh meaning or application for him, then this chapter may actually have pointed the way to a simple but useful meditation on St. Luke xv:8. He has not consciously followed any scheme or outline. He has gone straight to some words of our Lord and gained something from them. In that case it has been Bible reading made real.

But if so, it may be worth while to analyze a little, and note what we actually did.

1. We let our thoughts dwell upon the different parts of the verse, so that the motto "Seek and ye shall find" became connected with the parable, and suggested the use which might be made of it. This led us also to find helpful meanings in the "candle" and the "sweeping." We may often find, when we concentrate our minds upon a passage, that a

stray sentence or idea, a chance circumstance, or a remark made by some one, will enter into the words before us and open up an unexpected train of thought. 2. We tried to make the story, the woman's wishes and actions and feelings, as vivid and real as we could. It is scarcely possible to dwell in detail upon any narrative without doing this. And even when it is not a narrative that we are studying, but a piece of an epistle, for example, or a prophecy, or a discourse, it is helpful to picture to ourselves the circumstances of the writer or speaker, the conditions and needs of those whom he is addressing; sometimes we can go further, and try to imagine the results that his words would have, whether success or failure. The great thing is to escape, by every means in our power, from the feeling that we are merely reading a set portion of the Bible as an act of piety. The passage before us was intensely real when it was first written or spoken, and we must strive to make it real for ourselves by thought and imagination. 3. We put ourselves into the story. All that was said about the woman we "transferred in a figure" to ourselves. Sometimes it is helpful to put other people into it as well as, or instead of, ourselves. But however we do it, we must

try to make the passage modern, to carry it over the centuries and find in it a meaning for to-day. 4. Assuming that we started with a real desire to gain help from the passage, we cannot have put ourselves in the woman's place without a resolve to do as she did, that is, to find treasure by diligent search.

All these four actions will find a place in most of our meditations, though not necessarily in this order, nor as four distinct parts of a scheme or outline. Many people, if they were told that meditation ought to consist of (1) thought, (2) imagination, (3) application, (4) resolution, would turn away from it in despair, if not disgust. And yet to any one who has grasped the main idea of what a meditation is, and how much can be done with it, some or all of these four actions will come quite naturally and spontaneously.

VIII. FURTHER SEARCH

BUT when we have sought and found one piece of treasure, it is very improbable that we have exhausted the possibilities of a passage. After thanking God the Holy Spirit for leading us to a truth, we lift our hearts to Him in a momentary cry for inspiration and guidance, and then study the words afresh. This time we may be led to think of the primary meaning with which our Lord uttered them. That would ordinarily be our first thought in examining any passage. This requires that the verse should be studied in its context—usually a very important part of a meditation. An entire chapter or more, or a section of a chapter, needs in many cases to be read quickly through, that we may grasp its contents and purpose as a whole. The chapter before us (St. Luke xv) teaches the joy of God over one sinner that repenteth. This is not arrived at by any imaginative treatment; it is the center and core of each of the three parables, the Lost Sheep, the Lost Piece

of Silver, and the Lost Son. But this intellectual grasp of the whole chapter only provides us with material. Meditation must then begin. The eager joy of God. Think of it! We previously put ourselves into the woman's place; now we are trying to put God there. Shut your eyes a moment, and with quiet concentration and a broad expanse of thought try to get, so to speak, a bird's-eye view of the world; think of all the peoples of the earth—all of them sinners, every one. Some of them are wandering in feebleness and folly, like the sheep; some are lost, but are ignorant and unconscious of being lost, like the piece of silver; some are knowingly self-willed, ungrateful, degraded, like the prodigal son. (You might wish to dwell more fully on this threefold thought another time.) And then, with all mankind massed together, as it were, before your eyes, you turn and watch God, who loves and values every one of them, receiving back into His glad possession one here and one there.

At this point an additional thought might occur to you, suggested perhaps by some commentary or other book that you had previously read. It is possible that our Lord was thinking of the piece of silver, not as a coin of

current money, but as a piece—whether a coin or not—from a bracelet or necklace. The loss of it spoiled the completeness and symmetry of the whole; and that would make the woman the more anxious to find it. Every sinner is valued by God not only as an individual, but as an integral part of one organic whole, which is grievously incomplete without him or her. (Here is another thought which might form the basis or starting point of a meditation at another time.) After turning aside for a moment to this truth you go back to your central thought of the eager joy of God.

Dwell on all the work that is going on all over the world. Let your mind be carried from detail to detail in ever widening circles—the work of the Church at home, and in the mission field and the dominions and colonies, and the work done by Christians in other branches of the Church—all the good influences of which God is making use, seeking, drawing, and then clasping to His heart of love every soul that returns to Him in penitence, and thereby makes more complete the one circle of the redeemed. If you can get, for a moment, a deep inner glimpse into the love of God you will have made a glorious meditation.

And then, perhaps, you would search your

memory for some words to express what you have felt. Your Bible study in the past would here come to your aid. It might suggest to you the verse, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." And you would shut your eyes still tighter and think again: God has loved all sinners *from everlasting*; and therefore in the time of each of their little lives on earth He began and continued to draw them with love. "He drew them with the cords of a man, with cords of love." "God is love."

The love of God is broader than the measure
of man's mind,
And the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind.

And your thoughts would try to keep working on a large scale, as you thought of the nations; lost sheep for whom the Shepherd gave His life; lost jewels of untold value to Him; lost sons for whom the Father grieves. And you would turn your meditation into an outpouring of prayer for the salvation of men, for the satisfaction of the yearning love of God. "O my God, grant unto all Thy children so to seek Thee whom their souls desire to love, that they may both find Thee and be found of Thee."

It might be that by this time your daily duties would call you away. But through that day, as you walked along the streets, or met men and women and children in trains or busses or at work, you would carry with you this vast, mysterious wonder of the love of God, seeking, drawing the hearts of all.

But I doubt if you could get so far without seeing that the verse contained yet more for you. If you had time you could gaze at it a little longer; if not, you could come back to it next day. (An important reminder is here necessary. Never allow yourself to be tied by any list of daily portions, or any rigid arrangement or scheme or outline, so that you feel obliged to begin a fresh passage though you can see that the one before you is going to yield you some more treasure. Lists of daily portions and the like are very useful and helpful as signposts along a road; but you must hold yourself free, in meditation, to leave the road at any time in order to enjoy the surrounding beauties and delights.) You would begin at the point where you left off—God's love for all men, and His joy when any soul returns to Him. But now you think more definitely of the human instruments that He makes use of in seeking them. The woman now becomes a

picture of the clergy and of all religious workers at home and abroad. Pray for them that the divine Candle, the illumination of the Holy Spirit, may guide and help them in their search. But do not let the prayer be perfunctory, a mere part of a regular routine in meditation. Go on repeating your petition until you have put real meaning into it, until your soul goes out to the great army of God's fellow workers all over the world, and you can say to them with truth, "I have wished you good luck, ye that are of the house of the Lord."

But then you can go on. You can put yourself once more, but with a different meaning, in the woman's place. God wants to use *me* to seek for souls that He loves. I may be a clergyman, or a Church worker, or not, but I can never be quit of the responsibility of being a fellow worker with God. And you will ask yourself, What can I do to gain more of His drawing power? This will make you shut your eyes again, and examine yourself as to your example and influence, love for others, and use of opportunities. And with a penitent confession of failure you will be led on to yet one more meaning in the verse.

Not only the woman, but also the lost piece of silver can represent me. With every sin I

am lost until I satisfy God's love by returning to Him. You can review your life, and think of the countless ways in which His love has shown itself, and the countless ways in which you have grieved and disappointed Him. And you can then bow your head and yield up your whole being to try and *feel* the love of God drawing you. If your heart becomes engrossed in this, you may even pass into the still silence of contemplation. It may last for only a few seconds, but you will have been plunged for a timeless moment into Reality.

IX. FRESH MATERIAL

SOME who are beginners in their self-training may very likely, after reading these two chapters, raise one of two objections.

1. They may say, "All this does not appeal to me very much; it may be all right on paper, but I cannot make it *real* for myself." But that is quite natural, because you have not made the meditation for yourself; you have merely been reading, in cold blood, some thoughts suggested by some one else. This little book has been written only to help you in your self-training; not to suggest particular thoughts which have occurred to the writer on a given passage, but to point out a variety of ways and means which you can try for yourself in attacking any passage. These chapters must not be considered as a series of addresses or sermons or devotional readings; they contain merely specimens to illustrate methods which may be followed in acquiring a difficult art.

2. Others will perhaps say, "I could not possibly get all that out of a single verse!" But

it is not in the least necessary that you should. All verses are not equally rich, though many contain more treasure than we have any idea of till we begin to "sweep and seek diligently" with the light of the Holy Spirit. But if after wandering slowly through a long passage you gain from one verse in it a single thought which strikes home, and leads you to offer a single genuine prayer, or make a single heartfelt resolve, you have added wealth to your spiritual life, and you can thank God and take courage. The same passage, at another time, would very likely yield a fresh find which entirely escaped you before. You are not the same person that meditated upon it before. You have lived through new experiences, perhaps new trials and temptations, and met new people; a million thoughts have passed through your mind; you have heard sermons and conversations, and read books. Your whole self has grown and altered. And therefore a given passage may mean something to you which it could not possibly mean when you thought about it on a previous occasion. That is one of the pleasures of meditation; the Bible can constantly yield fresh thoughts, because we are constantly changing.

Let us now look at another method. A con-

cordance is often an extremely valuable help because it can provide us with an enormous stock of material; and most beginners feel that that is one of their chief needs. Choose from the passage which you are studying some prominent word which you think may be likely to yield good results, and look it up in a concordance. For example, in the verse that we have been thinking about, the principal thought has been that of "seeking." Look up the passages in which the word "seek" occurs, and pick out those which bear upon the two ideas of our seeking for God, and God's seeking for us. You need not take them all; select those which seem, at the first glance, likely to be the most fruitful for your immediate purpose. The thought of our seeking for God is found, for instance, in:

(*a*) 2 Chron. xxx:19, "The good Lord pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God."

(*b*) Ps. lxiii:1, "O God, Thou art my God, early (that is, eagerly) will I seek Thee."

(*c*) Prov. viii:17, "They that seek Me early shall find Me."

(*d*) Jerem. xxix:13, "Ye shall seek Me

and find Me when ye shall search for Me with all your heart."

(*e*) St. Matt. vi:33, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness."

And the thought of God's seeking for us, in:

(*f*) Ps. cxix:176, "I have gone astray like a sheep that is lost; seek Thy servant."

(*g*) St. Luke xix:10, "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

(*h*) St. John iv:23, "The Father seeketh such to worship Him."

Having made a preliminary selection, you can shut the concordance and try to draw out a line of thought for your meditation by linking up as many of the passages as you can into a connected chain, using them, of course, in any order you like; a different order will sometimes suggest different thoughts. You may not be able to do this with all the verses that you have written down; you will probably end by striking some of them out; only do not discard too hurriedly. But when the remainder have finally taken their places in the chain, you will

probably find a rich suggestiveness in the series as a whole which no one passage could have yielded. The following is a specimen of the way in which the verses printed above might be treated. (But the reader who wants to make his self-training a real and practical thing is advised, before reading any further, to try to make his own meditation on them. If he does this as earnestly as he can, however briefly and simply, he will probably reach results of greater spiritual value to himself than he would gain by merely reading what is suggested here.)

The passage marked (*a*) clearly gives the necessary beginning that we spoke of in Chapter VI. You can turn the words at once into a prayer: "O good Lord, Thou knowest that I want to prepare my heart to seek Thee. Pardon me all the sins and weakness and coldness of heart and wandering thoughts that make it so difficult for me. And pardon all those who are preparing to seek Thee to-day." Here you can let your thoughts dwell for a little on the multitude of Christians who are trying to meditate, or to get nearer to God by any kind of prayer, and you can pray that they may have help to succeed in what you find so difficult.

(*b*) is a prayer already made for you. Say it over and over again, and try to make "Thou

art *my* God" a reality, an immense pressing fact, by a reverent, affectionate clinging to Him, clasping Him, feeding on Him, drinking Him in.

And in (*c*) you have His answer. (That is what the Hebrew prophets delighted in. Their minds were so concentrated on Him that they often heard His message as though He were speaking to them; and they sometimes wrote down their thoughts in the form of a colloquy between Him and them. Other well-known examples of this are seen in the *Imitation of Christ*.) Listen to the words as though He were speaking them audibly; and then thank Him for His promise.

But in (*d*) He says more to you. Listen again. He is telling you why it is so hard for you to find all that you want to find in Him. "You will find Me (fully) when you search for Me *with all your heart*."

And (*e*) shows you what that means. To seek Him eagerly it is not enough merely to be anxious to make what feels like a successful meditation. You must put Him first in your daily life, your daily wishes, your daily plans and hopes and ambitions.

You will probably feel that this last passage calls for more detailed thought, and you will

dwell upon it a little longer. I am to "seek the kingdom of God." How am I doing it? Do I pray for it enough, or earnestly enough? Do I offer *real* prayers for my family and relations, that His "kingdom" may come into their lives? For the people with whom I live or work? For missionary work at home and abroad? Again, does my own character exhibit a good example of what His kingdom, His sovereignty, means? In my daily work and recreations can every one see that He is my King? In my religious work can I think of any mistakes in method or manner or motive which are retarding the coming of His kingdom? Meditation will often drive us into self-scrutiny; and that must end, in every case, with confession and resolves. Once more, I am to "seek His righteousness." And the self-scrutiny starts afresh. Am I satisfied, or not dissatisfied enough, with my own righteousness? And what is my righteousness, considered in itself? Am I always quite scrupulously "true and just in all my dealings," or in my thoughts about others, or in what I say about them? Is my righteousness something that I am rather pleased with? Do I ever give way to the temptation to compare my righteousness with that of so-and-so?

And then you will begin to realize that your meditation on this verse might launch out into widening circles if you collected from a concordance the passages which suggest various meanings of God's "kingdom" and "righteousness." And you will make a note to look them up another time. But for the present you turn your attention to the verses which speak of God as seeking us.

(*f*) provides you with a prayer with which to start the new series. "O Lord, I have gone astray in sins and mistakes that I know well, and I may be wandering and lost in others that I know not of. Seek me, and draw me out of them." "O Lord, I have a little desire after Thee; but I feel so cold, and dried up, and incapable. Seek me, and find the little love that I have, and cherish and deepen it in me."

Then (*g*) will give you His answer: "I became Incarnate in the Son of Man for this very purpose." Rest on this for a moment. Try to bring your soul into stillness while you feel the "humanity of God," His sympathy, His knowledge of your difficulties, temptations, worries, sorrows, joys. And if you can, for the briefest moment, make this wonderful thing real, your heart—and perhaps, if you are alone, your body also—will fall down before Him, and

you will worship in spirit and in truth, that is, in reality.

And (*h*) will then come to you with a gush of pleasure. That I should worship in spirit and in truth is exactly what God wants and delights in. The Father seeketh such; He has been all the time seeking me, that I might reach this act of true worship.

We have thought of intellectual study and search as providing apparatus or scaffolding for meditation; and no one has an idea how useful a tool a concordance can be till he tries. Sometimes the references in the margin of the Bible can give similar help, but the choice of passages cannot, of course, be so wide. It must be remembered, however, that as with any other tool the free and fruitful use of it needs practice. To the beginner the concordance with its list of references may seem, at first, to yield no material at all, or in some cases so much material that he hardly knows how to sift it. But practice and an eager desire will do wonders with the help of God.

X. GOSPEL STORIES

THOSE of us who have had some practice in meditation will admit, probably without exception, that we have often failed badly. How many of us have had to confess that our meditations have been lifeless and empty, that we have nearly or quite fallen asleep over them, that we have sometimes felt relieved when the minutes that we had set ourselves had come to an end, and the like. The reasons for this have been various; for example, setting to work without the determination to persevere, or without the concentration that can shut out from the mind other things, persons, and thoughts, or without much keen desire to get anything, or with the mistaken desire to gain enjoyment from our own ingenuity. Sometimes, indeed, it is simply tiredness of brain, or physical ailments. But there are also very many Christians who are unable to meditate, because, though they have frequently been told that they ought to, they have never been told how. We often say in the collect that God has "caused

all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning"; but many people treat only bits and scraps of Holy Scripture—and often very small ones—as being of any real use to them, so that their Bible dwindles, for spiritual purposes, to a few favorite passages or favorite texts. They turn over the pages and, like the spies, say in despair that the land is barren. But progress in meditation would gradually show them that, after all, the land floweth with milk and honey.

The guidance that such people need must be as varied and elastic as possible, in order that they may be free to try different methods, and learn, by practice and experience, which of them are the most helpful to their temperament and spiritual needs. Let us, therefore, turn to other ways in which we can use our material.

If you wanted to read any part of the Bible to a small child, what sort of passage would you naturally choose? It would certainly be a story, and for preference a story from the life of our Lord. And what would you want the child to gain from it? Not a mere knowledge of historical events simply as events. No history ought really to be taught in such a way, least of all the Gospel history. (The "simple Bible teaching" given in schools which treats all Bible narratives from the first chapter of

Genesis onwards on the same level merely as events in the dead past, without drawing from them their meaning for the living present, has probably done more than anything else to create in the present generation the indifference, boredom, and dislike which are so widely felt with regard to the Bible.) You want the child to catch something of the permanent, divine meaning of the event. One result in his mind ought to be that he has begun to see *why* the evangelist put that story into his book. Now if the reader of this chapter will be content to be a child, let him take any Gospel story that he likes, and not leave it till he has arrived at some answer to that question; and he will have made a real beginning in meditation. He may succeed in finding more than one answer, which is better still. But his meditation will not be complete till he has brought his answer or answers into touch with the present. He must somehow make the purpose of the story real for himself, applying it either to his own life and character, or to the needs of others, or using it to deepen his understanding of our Lord's nature and character, and through them of the nature and character of God. The question *why* that story was written sounds simple, but very few people take the trouble to ask it.

Stories in the Gospels often include some words of our Lord; and to apply His words will at once give opportunities for more detailed meditation. But a story pondered as a single whole often yields rich results.

For example, the story of our Lord turning water into wine (St. John ii:1-10). What was the evangelist's main purpose in telling that story? He himself gives a clear hint when he says: "This beginning of His signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory" (*v.* 11). Now, if that narrative is treated merely as an account of an event of nineteen centuries ago, it concerns you very much less than something that you did yesterday afternoon. But if you ask for the *meaning* of it, you begin inevitably to meditate upon the tremendous truth that the transformation of the water is only a "sign," a picture, a symbol, of something that Christ is always doing; that God, who is still and always Incarnate in His Son, is still and always manifesting His glory by working transformations. And then, to complete your meditation, you are compelled to ask, What transformations does He perform to-day, and what can I ask Him to perform, in me, in others, in the Church, in the nation, in the world? Thus, without dwelling on any

subsidiary details in the narrative you are led on by the story, taken as a single whole, into thought, imagination, application, petition, praise, and I have no doubt private determinations and resolves. All these tend quite easily and naturally to form parts of your meditation, though you did not set out with the intention of following any exact analysis or scheme.

The stories in the book of the Acts and many in the Old Testament can be used in the same way. *All* Holy Scriptures were written for our learning, that is, to provide us, not with a collection of facts, but with materials from which we can construct a ladder set up for our souls from earth to heaven. The best stories of all are, of course, those told by our Lord Himself. Jews were great at telling stories, and some of the later Jewish writings which have come down to us contain a large number of parables. But for freshness, simplicity, and telling force the parables of Jesus Christ remain unique. Their primary meaning is generally clear, and beginners in meditation can use it as has been here suggested. But their details also are rich in stored-up funds of spiritual treasure to be found by those who seek.

XI. "LORD, SHEW US THE FATHER"

THE story of which we have just been thinking suggests another method of meditation of the very greatest value. Begin by reminding yourself that Jesus Christ took human nature in order to reveal to men the nature and character of God. "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." So that you can make use, in a right sense, of St. Philip's words as an opening prayer, "Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us." "Lord, shew me, in my reading to-day, something of what the Father is like." Then take a story which relates actions and words of our Lord, and imagine yourself, not put into the place of any of the actors, but present at the scene as a hidden spectator and listener, and think quietly and deeply of what elements, traits, features, in the divine nature and character and modes of action our Lord reveals to you.

Take, for instance, the well-known story in St. Luke v:12-14. You are present when the man full of leprosy comes face to face with

Jesus and His disciples, and you are intently on the lookout for what our Lord will say and do. Leprosy was due to sin, if not always, at least so often that it became typical of it, and its cure is almost invariably spoken of in the New Testament as a "cleansing." At the moment therefore that the leper approaches you will perhaps expect to see the faces of the disciples express a shade of disgust and disapproval. But what is to be seen on the face of the Lord? Such a look that the leper "when he saw Jesus" said, "Lord, if Thou wilt Thou canst make me clean." The look reveals to you compassionate pity both for physical distress and for the sin which probably lay behind it in the man's own history, or in that of his family before him. It is the compassionate pity of God Himself. Think for a moment of that pity poured out for the whole mass of human suffering at the present time, and for the whole mass of human sin which is ultimately at the back of it. Think, for instance, of the battle which has begun to be waged in recent years against the sins which are the source of disease, and you will offer a prayer that it may be carried forward and prospered.

Then you turn to watch the Lord again. "He put forth His hand and touched him."

It needs some knowledge of the Jewish ideas of pollution to realize what a wonderful action that was. It involved the divine principle of "mercy and not sacrifice," of love overriding external rules. The Divine Heart which abhors sin as alien to its nature comes deliberately into contact with it in order to do away with it. It contains in symbol the very truth of the Incarnation. God so loved the world that He "touched" human nature, took it upon Himself with all its sinfulness, so that upon the Son of God was laid the iniquity of us all.

At this point your thoughts might go far afield if you gave them rein; but you make a note to meditate some other time, perhaps with the help of a concordance, on our Lord's "touch"; the different persons whom He touched, each of them typical; and, if you like to go further, the different persons who touched Him.

But at present you are simply watching and listening. And you hear Him say, "I will; be thou clean." What can that reveal to you of God? It expresses divine purpose, God's Will deliberately acting, planning, purposing to bring about men's salvation from sin. (Again a concordance would be useful, in another day's meditation, to suggest passages bearing on the

"Will" of God.) And when that Will meets with a responsive faith it acts instantaneously, though it is thwarted and nullified if faith is absent (St. Mark vi:5, 6).

Then, as you continue watching, you see the wonderful "cleansing" effected, an exhibition of the power of God. And at such a moment you will turn back quickly to look again at the Lord's face, which must have been lit with the eager joy of God over one sinner that repented, and obtained cleansing by an act of faith. (This might suggest another line of meditation for a future occasion; you could range through the Gospels to find occasions on which Jesus Christ was made glad or pleased. It would reveal to you something more of the joy of God.)

Now you hear Him speak again. "He charged him to tell no man." What does that reveal? This may need a little thought, and perhaps reference to a commentary, to realize why He gave him such a charge. He did not want the people to crowd round Him merely as a wonder-worker. If He had wanted that, He could have charged him to tell every one, and then have simply waited there till He was besieged by multitudes, and have healed all those among them who had faith to be healed. But His object during His short earthly life

was not healing. Physical illness and pain are only symptoms of the world's disease, which is sin; and God's plan of salvation is not to relieve symptoms but to remove the disease. Pure compassion, indeed, led our Lord to heal many who came to Him (*v.* 15); and that has been to this day the inspiration of the self-sacrificing lives of doctors and nurses, and of many others who labor for the physical welfare of men. But a meditation on the words "He charged him to tell no man" would keep a good many people from a mistaken sense of proportion in the place which they assign to the healing of the body in relation to Christianity.

Once more. "Go thy way, and shew thyself to the priest, and make an offering for thy cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them." Why did our Lord tell him to do that? Because the man was a Jew, a member of the Jewish Church, the corporate body of the people of God. If Christ is here revealing to you something of God it is a matter of great importance. It shows that God does not want any one of us to live his spiritual life merely as an individual. While we are in the body we need membership in a visible, corporate Church, and must be loyal to its rules and institutions. And you can wait a

moment to ask yourself whether there is any rule of the Church to which you can resolve to be more loyal than you have been.

And now, having been present at the scene, and learned something about God, you will close your meditation by following Christ for a few minutes into the intense stillness and solitude of prayer (*v.* 16).

XII. THE BEAUTY OF HOLINESS

THE suggestions made in the foregoing chapter lead us naturally to another field of study, which is not another, but the same in a different aspect. If you stand and gaze at the Matterhorn as it towers above Zermatt, you can carry away a deep and mysterious impression of its unearthly and terrible beauty. But to convey the same impression to others who have never seen it would require the genius of a consummate artist. That may serve to illustrate the spiritual genius of our Lord's earliest disciples. At first they proclaimed simply that He was the Messiah, and that He had died and risen. But new converts naturally wanted to know what He was like before that. What kind of life must it have been which led to such a climax? And the disciples had to attempt what we might have thought the hopeless task of conveying to others the impression which He had stamped upon their minds. The four evangelists collected the salient features in four brief accounts—the merest pencil sketches, so to speak. They are far from being complete

portraits, but they have achieved a success which no other biographical writings have even remotely approached. Each of them is a literary and spiritual miracle, because each of them conveys an impression, that will live to the end of time, of the fairest of the sons of men. But just as a painting of the Matterhorn will convey a far deeper and completer impression to a trained artist than to any one else, so we need a lifelong course of self-training in meditation to enable us to penetrate to the unutterable beauties of the perfect Man, sketched for us in the Gospels.

Probably the best way to do this, at any rate till we have had a good deal of practice, is not to make the character of our Lord the whole subject of a meditation, but to make it an accompaniment of other lines of study. It is not easy to practice it as a method by itself, because the portrait is so subtle and full of meaning. While we are searching the Gospels, according to any of the methods which have already been suggested, we can be always on the lookout for some slight touch which will yield a fresh feature, or supply a fresh illustration of a feature, in the heavenly picture. And, of course, every time we catch one, we shall turn it into a prayer and a resolve.

We have before us, for instance, St. Luke xi. The Lord's Prayer offers itself for meditation. But before we reach it we are arrested by the fact that it was the sight of our Lord praying which led the disciples to ask Him to teach them to pray. We try hard to make a mental picture of Jesus Christ at prayer. Was He standing, with arms raised in Jewish fashion? If so, the disciples must have seen His face, with its look of rapt and absorbed devotion, which they could not dream of describing in words, but which must have stamped itself upon their minds with an impression that made prayer a new thing to them. Or was He bowed upon the ground, kneeling up against a rock, or prostrate, like Elijah, with His face between His knees? Or was He sitting on a grassy mound by the roadside, His hands clasped, in a tense stillness, His spirit alone with God? To imagine the scene, which stirred the disciples to a new resolve, is enough by itself to stir us to fresh longings to pray more and pray better. And then we can go deeper and ask, Why did He pray? Was He performing a pious exercise as a daily duty? And we shall very likely be pricked to the heart when we remember how often our prayers are that, and little more. Why did He pray? Because

prayer was an absolute necessity of His life. He had come into the world to begin the age-long task of bringing men into union with God; and that could not be done unless He always kept Himself, with the help of prayer, in union with God. He no doubt prayed, as we can do, at other times, as He walked the roads and streets, as He sat at meals, and so on; but that did not release Him, and it does not release us, from the need of setting apart definite times for prayer. By simply dwelling, with a certain amount of imagination, on the words "as He was praying in a certain place," we can stamp afresh upon our minds the impression which the disciples received. The prayerfulness of Christ shows us what true prayer can be, and the place which it must occupy in the beauty of holiness.

At another time our study may begin at *v.* 29. "And when the multitudes were gathered together unto Him." It is unsafe to let a single clause slip by without examination. What can we get from that sentence? We are on the lookout for features in the portraiture of Christ's character. As we watch the crowds hurrying to the spot from different directions, and our Lord waiting, ready to speak to them, some of us will think of moments when we

have faced a congregation to whom we are to speak. What is the natural, human tendency of a speaker when a congregation is gathered to hear him? A good many would have to confess that their instinct is to say something that will be "liked," to preach an "acceptable" sermon, a sermon, perhaps, of real ability, with some approach to eloquence, above all one that will enhance the preacher's reputation, and will "draw." Perhaps we shall recall Ezekiel's words (xxxiii:31*f.*): "They come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as My people, and they hear thy words, but do them not; for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their gain. And lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument; for they hear thy words, but they do them not." How many of the clergy, if they were honest, would admit that some of their sermons have been "performances," such as to produce precisely that effect! But what does our Lord do? He faces the expectant crowd, waiting to hear gracious words proceed out of His mouth, and begins: "This generation is an evil generation," and then hammers in some home truths. It stamps upon our mind an impression of strong,

lonely greatness, to which popularity, or fame, or attractiveness means less than nothing. If we are Church workers, and especially if we are clergymen, we shall probably stop reading, and think furiously. And then we can make our prayer to God to help us to be a little more like His Son—"neither caring to please, nor fearing to displease, any save only Thee."

XIII. MORE BEAUTIES

OR let us suppose that we are working through St. Mark x. While we are searching it in detail we shall keep our eyes open all the time for touches of character in our Lord. In *vv.* 1-12 we hear Him boldly expressing Himself on the great subject of social morality. He was not only meek and lowly in heart, loving, tender, and compassionate. He was a vigorous "man of affairs," who had thought matters out, and reached definite conclusions on the great problems of the day. (This may lead us another time to search for further instances of this.) In *vv.* 13-16 we see His tenderness to little children. Clear-sighted wisdom in dealing with the problems of society did not interfere with His great love for the little ones. And this, again, is coupled with "indignation" towards those who thought children a nuisance, or unworthy of notice. In the next paragraph (*vv.* 17-22) we find another beautiful feature—sympathy with young men. "Jesus beholding him, loved him."

The man who cannot love young men, even the idle rich, as well as children, has a long way to go before his character approaches that of the Lord. And when He turns to speak to the disciples (*vv.* 23*ff.*) we can hear the sadness in His voice as He expresses His deep sympathy for those whose spiritual life is rendered terribly difficult by their outward circumstances.

A large wisdom in matters of social life, love for children, indignation, love for young men, sympathy with the difficulties of the rich. And then, quite suddenly (*vv.* 32-34) we come to an altogether different region of His character —the steely strength which made Him go deliberately to His death. And His strength did not make Him go to it unmoved. As they walked along the road "they were amazed, and they that followed were afraid." The look of agonized struggle on His face terrified them. Self-sacrifice with nonchalance or callousness is not so great a thing as self-sacrifice with mental agony. And in the midst of it He turned to them for sympathy—the same men with whom He had been indignant. He felt He must tell them the fearful thing that was looming over His soul. He loved them so much that He wanted their help.

Yet again we turn the diamond round, and another facet flashes before us in *vv.* 35-45. The sons of Zebedee were self-centered and ambitious, and He had to show them that they were aiming at a high thing in a wrong way. The ten were angry, as though supporting the Lord in opposition to the two. But He knew better; He knew that they were angry because they also were self-centered and ambitious, and did not like the thought of any of their number gaining an advantage over the rest. Insight was a strongly marked feature of His character. And in His answer He showed that He understood them. But He was tactful, and rebuked no one. He simply held up before them all, as He had before James and John, the greatness of true humility, with the humility of the Son of Man as the supreme example.

Lastly, in healing Bartimæus (*vv.* 46-52) He showed His compassionate readiness to help distress in any form, but also the spiritual skill which can lead a man to be true to his best self without realizing that he is being led. The blind man at first cried "Pity me!" that is, "give me alms." (The Greek word for "to pity" is the verb from which the word for "alms" is derived.) But His question, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" and

probably the tone of voice with which He said it, called for a magnificent faith in Him; and the man rose to the call and was healed.

Now, we might read the whole of this chapter in one meditation, observing all these manifold features of character. But we should more probably study each paragraph as a subject in itself. Each would yield other treasure as we pored over it verse by verse, but as an accompaniment we should try keenly to observe the one or two aspects of character which it might portray. As we go on day by day, always on the lookout for these, the picture, the impression stamped upon our mind, will gradually grow in wonder and complexity. We shall increasingly realize the extraordinary balance of qualities in our Lord. We sometimes say that a man has "the defects of his qualities." He is too stern to be kindhearted, or too kindhearted to be stern; too honest to be always tactful, or too tactful to be always honest, and so on. But with Jesus Christ we can never say that there was too little of this, or too much of that. And at every fresh revelation we shall compare ourselves with Him, and pray that our character, or the character of others for whom we intercede, may become a brighter reflection of His beauty of holiness.

XIV. THE EPISTLES

SO far we have thought mostly of the Gospels; and there is no doubt that in them we ought to find our principal store of material. The Son of God is so wonderful—wonderful to our intellect when we try to study Him, wonderful in His teaching and example as a guide and spur to our will, wonderful in the power of His love and loveliness which move our deepest emotions. (Almost nothing has been said in this book about the Old Testament. As the reader makes progress in his self-training he will become more able to make spiritual use of it. But at first he will do well to make the New Testament his principal field of search.) But the Epistles must not be neglected. Like the Old Testament, but with more immediate force and inspiration, "they are they which testify" of Christ. Nowhere, however, is the danger so great of confining ourselves to favorite texts. We want to know first what an apostle wished to teach those to whom he was writing. The question *why* a given epistle was

written must be answered. And not until we have understood the needs and circumstances of the first readers, the chief aim or aims of the writer, and the course of his argument, can we gain at all fully an appreciation of what the epistle can mean for ourselves and others. A close and careful study of the Epistles with commentaries can, of course, be made a mere study of dry bones. It depends entirely on how you do it, and the spirit and motive with which you read. But if you do it in such a way that you obtain material for meditation you will find that the dry bones become alive with the Spirit of God; and as a fund for spiritual thought they are inexhaustible. But this is possible only for those who have—or with strong determination can manufacture—some spare time. Those who have little, and can make little, must be content with simpler meditations on particular passages or subjects. One way of doing this has already been suggested, that is, to dig deep into every sentence and almost every word, and to apply them to your own life, or the life of others, or to gain from them fresh or more vivid insight into the character and nature and actions of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

But there is another and simpler method

which may be very strongly recommended. Take the words of a passage clause by clause, and turn each of them into a short prayer to God, quite short, and as simple as you can make it. For example, 1 Cor. i:4-8, the Epistle for the 18th Sunday after Trinity.

I thank my God always. O my God, Thou art so kind that I ought to thank Thee always, but I hardly ever thank Thee enough; make me more thankful. *On your behalf.* St. Paul was thankful on behalf of other people; but I have scarcely learned to be that at all. Help me to thank Thee for any good that I can see in any one. *For the grace of God that is given you by Jesus Christ.* I want to thank Thee chiefly for the grace that Thou hast given to me and to others by Jesus Christ. [Here think of any particular grace that you have seen in some one whom you know, and say] O Lord, that grace (that kindness, or strength of will, or courage, or self-sacrifice, or resistance of temptation, or prayerfulness, etc.) in *A* or *B* or *C* is Jesus Christ living in him; I thank Thee for that revelation of Thy power. *That in everything ye are enriched in Him.* O my Lord, in Jesus Christ we can be enriched in everything. He can enrich my prayers, and my meditations, my character, and my knowl-

edge of Thee. He became poor that I, through His poverty, might be rich. And yet I am still so poverty-stricken. Forgive me, make me rich, and make me more able to use my riches. *In all utterance.* O God, enrich me, and those for whom I want to pray, in all utterance. Govern our tongues. Set a watch, O Lord, before our mouth and keep the door of our lips, that our utterance may always be truthful, kind, and pure. Help us to be fearless in speaking about the things that we value most. Enrich our words with helpful and cheering power, and with the tact that will make us always say the right thing. *And in all knowledge.* O God, enrich me in all knowledge. I know so little of Thee, or of others, or of myself. Go on teaching me, O Lord. *Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you.* O Christ, Thou didst bear testimony to the power and beauty of God by Thy life and character; and the Corinthians carried on and confirmed it. Help me also to do this wonderful thing. *So that ye come behind in no gift.* Grant, O Holy Spirit, that I (and *A* or *B* or *C*) may be lacking in no spiritual gift which Thou seest that we are capable of using for Thy glory. *Waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.* Lord Jesus Christ, the whole

Church is longing for Thy coming. Come in Thy great might into the hearts of all Thy children, and into the hearts of those who do not yet know Thee in all the nations of the earth; and hasten the time of Thy full and glorious coming, when the whole world will be Thine. *Who shall also confirm you unto the end.* Meanwhile, O Lord, we need so greatly the confirming, strengthening power of Thy Spirit. Grant that in Him we may go from strength to strength, till unto the God of gods appeareth every one of us in Zion. *That ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.* O my Father, if we are to be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, it cannot be by our own power or holiness; wash us and make us clean; bring all sinners to repentance, that all may be forgiven because of the death of Thy dear Son.

This is merely a specimen of the way in which a passage can be used. No two people, probably, would use it quite in the same way. It does not matter in the least what sort of words you use in your prayer, if only you put reality into them. (When you have turned the words of a sentence into the words of a prayer, do not dream of passing on to another sentence until you have really and earnestly

prayed the prayer.) There is here no attempt to follow any rules or outline of meditation such as are usually given in books, but it can, nevertheless, be a very real meditation. The reader is asked to take the Epistle for this week, and after careful self-preparation, to kneel down, and very quietly and slowly to try to do what he can with it.

XV. SUBJECTS

LET us briefly recall the six different ways, suggested in Chapters VII-XIV, in which the beginner can make use of his Bible for meditation. (1) To search a passage through and through with thought and imagination, sometimes offering a prayer on thoughts which arise out of it, sometimes making resolves, so that the words become to him present, and living, and real. (2) To treat in the same way a connected series or chain of passages selected with the help of a concordance. (3) To take as his material one primary thought or truth which emerges from a story when considered as a single whole. (4) To watch and listen to the actions and words of Jesus Christ in order to gain a fuller insight into the nature and character of God. (5) To be on the lookout, in every meditation on the Gospels, to catch fresh aspects of the manifold impression which the actions and words of Jesus Christ can stamp upon his mind. (6) To take a piece of an Epistle (and other parts

of the Bible, notably the Psalms, can be treated in the same manner), and to dwell upon every several clause in such a way as to turn it straight into a prayer.

There are other ways; but with the whole of the New Testament, not to speak of the entire Bible, before us, these six methods can provide the work of a lifetime and more. Scripture is limitless in its spiritual products, when we train ourselves in real meditation. The material, then, being so vast, we must find some principle which may guide us in the choice of our daily passage or passages. To turn over the pages, looking in a somewhat desultory way for a verse which will strike us at the first glance as likely to be helpful, is a bad plan just because it is desultory. It involves very little self-discipline or will power, very little thought or prayer, and will therefore yield very little spiritual result. The plan of reading straight through the New Testament in daily portions is better, because it frees us from the danger of confining ourselves to chance or favorite texts. But it has this disadvantage, that it does not bring before us the great facts and truths of religion in their due proportion and symmetry. These can be preserved only by letting a careful selection of *subjects* precede

the selection of passages. When a subject has been decided upon, we are free to range over the New Testament, with the help of any books or guidance that we can obtain, to discover passages which bear upon it.

Consider the following groups. The list, of course, is not exhaustive, but it may be useful in mapping out the principal lines of thought.

(*a*) God's work for our salvation through Jesus Christ
1. His Incarnation and Epiphany
2. His Sufferings and Death
3. His Resurrection and Ascension

(*b*) The continuation of that work through the Holy Spirit
4. His outpouring, and presence in the Church
5. Baptism and the Holy Communion
6. Other Sacraments

(*c*) The Christian life
7. Aspects of the character of Jesus Christ
8. The life and character of the saints
9. The teaching of our Lord and of the Apostolic writers

(*d*) The facts and mysteries of human life
10. Temptation and Sin

11. Pain and Sorrow
12. Life after death

(*e*) The Being of God

13. His Power, Providence, and Love
14. His Eternity and Infinity
15. His Triune Majesty

When we try to determine the order in which these subjects should be studied, the best guide that we possess is the Church's calendar. As every one knows, the great value of the calendar lies partly in the fact that it prevents any one or two aspects of Christian truth from assuming too great a prominence in our thoughts by bringing them all before us in turn. If we follow this guide, numbers 1-6, 10-12, and 14, 15, will fall into their natural places in the yearly cycle of study; number 8 will belong to the several festivals of the saints; and in the periods between the Epiphany and Ash Wednesday, and between Trinity Sunday and Advent, can be taken numbers 7, 9, 13, and a large overflow from the others, especially from numbers 4-6 for which Whitsun week does not give nearly enough time.

XVI. SOME SUGGESTIONS

IT may be useful to end with some miscellaneous suggestions on matters of detail.

1. Fresh material can frequently be gained by a comparison of the Authorized with the Revised Version, and in the case of the Psalms with the Prayer Book Version. This is not for the purpose of determining which is the best translation of a passage; that belongs to Biblical study, but not to meditation. It is in order to catch sight of new lines of thought. For those who can do it devotionally the best method of all is to study the New Testament in Greek. Or some may be able to turn to the Latin Vulgate, or to some modern translation —French, German, or Italian. Anything that gives you material is useful, provided you do not stop there, but go on to make spiritual use of it.

2. Many find it helpful to keep a notebook for occasional use. Do not try to record in it the results of your meditation, for they are often impossible to reduce to paper, and you

would generally spoil and blunt their force in the effort to express them in writing. But it is very useful for the purpose of jotting down things that you want to study at another time, trains of thought that would carry you too far from your subject if you followed them up at the moment, stray ideas suggested to you in sermons or books, which you think may repay further study. Sometimes when you come back to your memoranda to try to work out something you have noted you may, after all, find it barren. Never mind. If you are to "sweep the house and seek diligently" you must expect, before you find treasure, to come across a good deal that you do not need at the moment.

3. Books on meditation generally suggest some external details which may help to create or deepen devotional feeling: for example, to reserve a particular room, or part of a room, as your place of devotion, with a cross or crucifix or picture, or to make your meditation in a church. I do not wish to lay stress on such details, because this is a book on self-training, and the reader must learn by practice and experience what will help him most. Temperaments differ so widely, that while some people could hardly pray without some devotional ob-

ject before their eyes others would find such an object nothing but a distraction. Only I would beg any one who admits that he is a beginner not to decide beforehand what is best, but to give a good trial to such details as many of the saints have found a real help. The one thing that is absolutely imperative is, that he should somehow, somewhere, draw his thoughts —"collect" them as we say—away from the multitudinous details of his surface life, and concentrate them upon the deep things of God.

Similarly, I do not venture to urge the reader always to kneel, or sit, or stand for his meditation. Not only are temperaments different, but our own moods and feelings and physical conditions vary. An illness, or wound, or chronic weakness, which keeps a patient lying down can afford a priceless opportunity for meditation and prayer of all kinds. We must not, of course, slip into a lazy, lounging attitude, which our best instincts tell us is not reverent. If such an attitude is not polite in a drawing-room, it is not polite—to say the least—in the presence of the King of kings. It is utterly remote from the alertness which will accompany an eager desire to reach after contact with God. But it is impossible to say that

any one posture is always the most helpful in satisfying that eager desire.

4. Again, the time of day when we are to settle down to our Bible cannot, naturally, be the same for every one. I think there is no doubt at all that for meditation, as for all kinds of prayer, the best time is generally in the morning, and as early as possible. Any one who has felt the hush and loveliness of the country at a summer dawn can realize this. The infinite loveliness of God can reach us best in a half-hour of stillness, when our souls are fresh from last night's forgiveness, and have not yet been besieged by the things of daily life. But, as with other things, "it is accepted according to that a man hath." To any one who is eager to touch God, He will show what is the right time of day.

5. And the same applies to the question of how much time we ought to spend on it. Progress in self-training will assuredly lead to a lengthening of the time to the utmost limit that is possible. Some people may find it best to give two shorter periods in the day instead of one longer one. But be determined about it. Settle as far as possible, not how little, but how much you can normally devote, and then make a fixed resolve, which nothing but quite

extraordinary circumstances will cause you to break, that you will spend a given time each week in meditation. This will leave room for such variations from day to day as you may find necessary.

6. Beside rising from your meditation with a resolve—and that means usually an immediate, detailed resolve which you are certain that you can carry out if you try—take with you, sometimes, a single verse or clause or thought to which your heart can turn from time to time during the day. It not infrequently happens that the circumstances of the day will put fresh point into it. And even if they do not you can still keep its fragrance with you as though you were carrying about a choice flower. This is especially helpful on the days when it is impossible for you to make time for a set meditation.

7. Lastly, we cannot too often remind ourselves that it is a great mistake to think that a meditation has been good only when we have arrived at something novel and ingenious, or have worked out our thoughts with exhaustive elaborateness. Of course, what is elaborate for a beginner may be easy to a practiced expert. But neither must aim at elaborateness for its own sake. When we breathe fresh air,

every breath we take is new, but it is not novel. We are gradually building up our strength by continuous draughts of the same universal life-preserving source. If we dwell upon a thought of God that we have enjoyed before, we can still say, "I opened my mouth and drew in my breath." We are to "live in the Spirit," and "walk in the Spirit." Sometimes, it is true, we may catch for a moment the intoxicating scent of flowers or new mown hay, or of the good brown earth after rain, or the ozone from the sea; and we feel it has been worth while to have traveled far to get it. But for the most part life can be kept vigorous without these luxuries if we do not keep ourselves shut up in the stuffy atmosphere of a closed room, if we step daily out of our little earthly concerns and worries, and get into the fresh, moving atmosphere of God. The difference that it will make to us cannot possibly be described; it must be experienced. And that experience can be gained only by steady, earnest perseverance in self-training.

THE END

BOOKS OF RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE

CONTRIBUTIONS OF SCIENCE TO RELIGION
By SHAILER MATHEWS *and Thirteen Contributors*
How modern science conceives the universe, and how the conception of God is necessary to complete it. $3.00

RELIGION AND THE MIND OF TODAY
By JOSEPH A. LEIGHTON
A sincere, unbiased, reverent study of the confusion between the spirits of scientific inquiry and religious faith. $2.50

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE SPIRITUAL IDEAL
By FELIX ADLER
The Hibbert Lectures of 1923. Dr. Adler's philosophy applied to burning questions of the day. $1.50

RELIGION AND LIFE
By DEAN INGE *and Others*
Six connected chapters by eminent thinkers, on the fundamentals of personal religion.

A CENTURY OF ANGLICAN THEOLOGY
By CLEMENT C. J. WEBB
Theological developments in the Church of England and their relations with modern thought and life. $1.25

RELIGION AND NATURAL LAW
By C. F. RUSSELL
Clears away difficulties between religion and science. $1.25

HUMAN RELATIONS IN THE LIGHT OF CHRIST
By H. C. CARTER
Applications of Christianity to modern human life. $1.50

VILLAGE SERMONS BY A NOVELIST
By GUSTAV FRENSSEN
Simple, straightforward little talks on Christian essentials. $1.50

CONCERNING CHRIST
By A. C. McNEILE
Fundamental truths of Christianity for the world today. $1.50

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY

New York **London**

C0-EGZ-445